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Excellence in the Surface Coast Guard

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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from the

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December 1984

## ABSTRACT

"Excellence in the surface Coast Guard" was examined by interviewing eighteen senior Coast Guard officers, and then going aboard two cutters that they nominated as being excellent. The interviews with the senior officers revealed that there is a solid consensus among them about the vision of excellence. It includes such factors as the commanding officer setting the tone, operational accomplishment, and training the troops . In chapters I through VI we write about what these senior officers said. Aboard the cutters we learned that excellence is attainable, and that common characteristics did exist among the two cutters. They are; the commanding officer is the driver, the unit family, pride at all levels, and consistent management. We write about these attributes in chapters VII through X. In our concluding chapter we offer our recommendations on what can be done to further expand the study, and on ways that our findings can be used in the Coast Guard.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Excellent: "...being of the highest quality; exceptionally good; superb". It is probably safe to say that most Coast Guard officers share the desire to perform in an excellent manner. And most would like the units to which they are assigned, either as leader or led, to do the same. But excellence is an elusive quality. Just how is it defined for a cutter, an air station, or a staff office? What makes one cutter or station stand out from the rest? What does it do differently from average units? And what does it take, in terms of priorities in programs and policies, to achieve it? Questions like these have been asked and discussed on bridges and in wardrooms and CPO messes since the infancy of naval service. Today, when the Coast Guard is continually being asked to accomplish more and more with less and less, the answers have taken on a more critical aspect, and yet remain as elusive as ever. This thesis gave us the opportunity to attempt to find some answers.

We decided to focus our look at excellence by concentrating on surface ships in the Coast Guard. Our reasons for restricting this study to cutters are simple. First, since a majority of our experience thus far has been aboard cutters, we hoped our background would help in

conducting our research. Secondly, our ambition is to continue in surface operations, and we hope that what we learned will help us to be the best we can. Finally, we wanted to contribute something to those that are following on behind us. Perhaps what we found could benefit the junior officer as he or she struggles to understand and manipulate the complicated mix of structures, traditions, customs, people, and technologies that make up a cutter getting the job done.

We made our decision to limit our study exclusively to the high endurance and medium endurance cutter classes for three reasons<sup>1</sup>. First, we wanted to study units that were basically similar, especially in function and mission, in order to limit the effect of any complicating factors in our study. Secondly, we needed a sufficiently large population to give us an adequate sample. And finally, we wanted a type of unit on which a great many senior officers would have served in their careers. By limiting ourselves to cutters in these classes we are certainly not saying that other units cannot be excellent, or even that cutters in the

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<sup>1</sup> High endurance cutters range from 327' to 378' in length, with crews of 15-18 officers and 130-150 enlisted, while medium endurance cutters are from 180' to 270' long, with crews of 7-10 officers and 65-90 enlisted. Both cutters carry out similar missions such as search and rescue and enforcement of laws and treaties. Being larger, the HECs undertake longer deployments and are also tasked with Navy missions such as ASW. There are approximately 50 HECs and MECs presently serving in the Coast Guard fleet.

HEC/MEC classes have a better shot at it. It's simply that the HEC/MEC classes best fit our criteria for this study.

Our study was a two-phase undertaking. Phase I focused on the opinions of senior officers about excellence. Phase II involved getting out to the excellent units to find out what was going on. During Phase I, we interviewed eighteen officers(O-5 and above). We asked these officers to describe their vision of an "excellent" Coast Guard cutter, to tell us what it looked like and what it was doing differently from other cutters. We also asked them to tell us what factors they and other officers in staff positions used to evaluate a unit's excellence. Our first five chapters cover these topics. Finally, we asked them if they knew of any cutters that met their vision of excellence. We then selected cutters to visit based on (1) the number of times recommended, (2) the strength of the recommendation, and (3) whether the vessel was available to be interviewed during our time frame.

Admittedly, we relied exclusively on these subjective opinions to determine Phase II targets. But we could not find a set of hard copy, objective measures that is used Coast Guard wide as the standard by which cutters are evaluated. Certainly, some quantifiable measures do exist, such as inspection results, REFTRA scores, reenlistment rates, etc. However, this data is very difficult to get at in a timely fashion and often used in differing degrees by

staffs to evaluate a unit's performance. The result is that there is widespread disagreement in the Coast Guard as to the priorities or weights these measures should be given in determining the overall excellence of a cutter. In point of fact, the determination of excellence is subjective.

During Phase II we visited two of the consensus cutters to see if we could identify what attributes or characteristics were commonly present. During our visits we held unstructured interviews with the commanding officer, the executive officer, and small groups from the wardroom, CPO mess, and the mess deck. In chapters six through ten we tell you about the excellent cutters.

We feel what we have is significant. We believe that what the eighteen senior officers had to say about excellence and how it is viewed is worth knowing. They have been there. Their experience is driving and directing the Coast Guard today. For those of us whose ambition is to serve on and command a Coast Guard cutter, knowledge of their experience is invaluable. To complete the picture, what we saw on board the excellent cutters was also exciting. We found that being an excellent cutter takes more than being lucky in the personnel draw or having a new vessel or a good homeport. Telling their stories is part of what this thesis is about.

## II. A VIEW FROM THE TOP

The officers and men of a cutter form an opinion about the performance of their unit but ultimately the unit's reputation in the fleet is a result of evaluations by senior officers. These senior officers are the headquarters and district staff officers responsible for the operational and administrative supervision of cutters in their areas. The different officers approve operational orders, budget requests, and admin reports as well as review message traffic and inspection reports. They form opinions about a cutter's operational level from the inputs they have examined. These opinions are further refined through informal conversations between senior officers until a consensus is reached concerning a cutter's evaluation. Very seldom is a unit privy to this process and must deduce its status by formal or informal "attaboys" from superior or peers.

This thesis is an attempt to identify what attributes exist in a Coast Guard surface command labeled excellent by its superiors. In outlining our research we found ourselves having to investigate several other questions. Is it possible to identify cutters classified as excellent? What attributes, if any, do these cutters have in common? Just how does a unit conduct business to gain the reputation of excellent in the fleet?



The methodology used in Phase I of the study consisted of interviewing commanders, captains and admirals with extensive operational experience aboard medium and high endurance cutters. Almost all of the eighteen officers interviewed had commanded at least one of the classes of vessels. The interviews were unstructured so as to allow for maximum input from interviewees. The average interview lasted ninety minutes.

The interviews covered two specific areas. First, we wanted to get these officers to give us their subjective opinions on what factors constituted excellence aboard a cutter. And finally, we asked them to identify cutters, by name, which they felt met their definition of excellence. The questions were organized into the four following groups.

1. In general, what attributes or characteristics does an excellent Coast Guard cutter possess? What common traits do they display that sets them above the average unit?
2. As a senior staff officer or evaluator, what means or tools do you utilize to evaluate units under your control? Please, limit your answer to those methods available to you from your desk or office.
3. When you visit a unit dockside, what do you look for in determining the present evaluation of that cutter?
4. Can you name any specific commands that meet the description you have given us? What percentage of cutters in the Coast Guard today do you consider excellent. In your opinion are the number of excellent ships increasing or decreasing?

The data was then analyzed for each officer and a list of attributes for each of the first three questions compiled. We then identified those attributes mentioned repeatedly and finalized our list. The findings from the questioning will be discussed in the next four chapters.

We became aware after several interviews that there is a consensus among senior officers on what must be happening aboard a unit and what output from a unit must be evident for it to be classified excellent.

### III. THE MENU OF EXCELLENCE

Senior officers agreed that there are many duties aboard a vessel that must be performed in a professional manner if the unit is to excell. As one captain put it, "there's a whole menu of things that have to be accomplished for you to have an excellent cutter." As explained, the officers we interviewed were of homogeneous operational backgrounds and their answers to the question of "What attributes does an excellent cutter display?" were very similar. Each officer's responses were examined by both of us. A listing was then compiled of the attributes mentioned by the officers. We examined this list and selected those attributes which were mentioned repeatedly. The product of this process are the following attributes:

- \* The commanding officer sets the tone
- \* The successful completion of operational missions
- \* The importance of a competent executive officer
- \* The right people have the right stuff
- \* A good ship is going to look good
- \* Training the troops to do their jobs

We are not foolish enough to claim that there are not other attributes that exist on board an excellent cutter or that we have listed the most important ones. We realize

that there are constraints in attempting to answer such a question. The officers answered the questions from different viewpoints. Some had just completed a tour aboard a cutter and were speaking from recent experiences. Others were speaking from their viewpoints of operational and administrative commanders. The information provided us was subjective and therefore it was impossible to analyze the qualitative or quantitative measures used by the individual senior officers.

#### A. THE COMMANDING OFFICER SETS THE TONE

The single attribute mentioned by every officer interviewed was that the commanding officer(CO) of a ship "sets the tone" for the performance of the unit. It is the responsibility of every CO to "set the course that his vessel will follow" and recognize when fine adjustments must be made to the ship's heading to maintain that course. A traditional philosophy is that the ship reflects the personality of the commanding officer, as if, the two become an integral unit. If a CO is "willing to accept mediocrity" then that is what the crew is going to give him.

Senior officers agreed that every new CO has a plan when he takes command. Some of these officers confessed to writing it down and to frequently referring back to it so as not to wander away from the plan during their tour. The captain of an excellent cutter is one that is able to

communicate to his crew the goals and objectives of his plan. They should be broad, clear, consistent, and frequently communicated. One captain reflected that one of his broad objectives was to improve the grooming standards aboard his command. His objective then became more specific as it traveled down the chain of command until finally junior petty officers were reminding non-rates to tuck in their shirt tails or to get a haircut.

Commanding officers must learn to delegate responsibility while still not losing touch with what is going on aboard his command. For the practice to function, the CO must ensure that he does not "interfere in an area that he has delegated responsibility" and that he uses the chain of command to monitor the performance of subordinates. It is imperative that the CO trust his people and that this trust is conveyed to them by his actions. This relationship is especially critical between the captain and the executive officer. The XO must be told the command policies and held accountable if they are not carried out. Just as important is that the XO "be given the latitude and the flexibility to do his job." The practice of delegation of responsibility is seen at almost every level of superior-subordinate relationships on excellent units. The idea of giving subordinates the ball and letting them run with it, provides the experience necessary for professional development.



Evident aboard excellent units is the accessibility of the commanding officer to his crew. It is important for the CO "not to lock himself in the cabin," leaving it only to go to the bridge or his car. The CO should be "up and about" observing his crew at work; especially in those areas where special projects are being accomplished. The overhaul of a ship's main engine, the rehabilitation of a berthing area, or the painting of the hull are good examples of such projects. A good commanding officer shows "a genuine concern for the personal problems of his crew." He must be willing to devote a portion of his own time to personnel problems that may arise. The CO must be careful not to become so over zealous that it appears as if he is meddling into the personal affairs of his people.

Effective commanding officers have proven themselves as competent shiphandlers and exhibit an above average knowledge of Coast Guard operations. To retain the confidence of his crew, the captain must know how to lower his small boats, properly conduct all drills, and be able to safely maneuver his vessel during critical evolutions. A captain, with strong feelings on the subject, said that a crew will "put up with a CO with a temper; they'll put up with a lush: they'll put up with almost any human failing if he doesn't let them down when it comes time to do whatever it is that they're supposed to do." He felt that if a CO is a poor shiphandler the crew will turn on him no matter how good he is at his other duties.

All the officers interviewed agreed that leadership in a CO was essential for a unit to reach its potential. One admiral said, "Good leadership is what makes the difference. Good leadership is what brings out outstanding performance." When asked what leadership style was most often used, there were a wide range of answers. But there was agreement among the officers on what two leadership styles do not work in the long run - the "God syndrome" and "buddy buddy" type commanding officers.

The "buddy buddy" type of leadership style is when a CO makes a habit of going on liberty with his crew and has everyone call him by his first name. Then when a situation occurs that illustrates to him that he has lost the respect of the crew and can no longer function effectively, he wonders what went wrong. "When the CO becomes part of the forecastle, he isn't the CO anymore - he's just one of the guys," as related to us by a captain. An experienced officer can be on friendly terms with his men without endangering their professional relationship.

The negative leadership style of commanding obedience or commanding things to happen has been nicknamed by one captain as the "God syndrome". The commanding officers who use this style can be heard saying, "I'm the CO and by the virtue of the fact that I'm the CO - I'm right." These are the commanding officers that sometimes get their crews to work for them but seldom, if ever, are able to get them to

work with them. Unfortunately, it is a style that young officers who are getting their first commands often adopt. Fearing possible failure as a CO and perhaps having worked under an officer who used the method, a young officer may choose to intimidate his crew instead of earning their respect by his abilities and dedication to duty. Only experience and serving with CO's who utilize more productive leadership styles can show that young officer that there are better ways to command troops.

A captain who had just completed a tour as commanding officer of a HEC told us that his command philosophy was centered about four little words.

TALK: A commanding officer must be able to communicate his goals effectively. "You must be able to convince your crew that their objectives are your objectives and that their goals are in consonance with yours." A CO should keep his crew informed and he should also take the time to listen to their concerns.

FAIR: There can exist no double standards. Fair and consistent treatment must be dealt out across theboard.

WORK: The standards of performance expected of a crew must be gauged relative to those exhibited by the CO.

CARE: A commanding officer must show concern for the well being of his men in both professional and personal matters.

These four little words represent simple truths that most officers claim to live by and yet so many seem to forget while in command positions. They are the essential core about which a successful commanding officer and excellent unit are formed.

## B. SUCCESSFUL MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

An attribute which all excellent cutters demonstrate is the ability to accomplish assigned operational missions. These are the units that not only perform their primary duties expertly but who are able to meet the challenge of accomplishing a secondary duty with the same expertise. These are the buoy tenders that conduct helo ops in a professional manner or the patrol boat that can answer the call to recharge an aid to navigation. They are units that are "ready to shift gears" and are not so restricted to their primary missions that they avoid the opportunity to pursue another because of unfamiliarity or a fear of failure.

Several captains in operational staff positions reported that the units with outstanding operational records were the units that conducted themselves in a enthusiastic and yet professional manner. According to one captain, they are not the MEC "that steams around boring holes in the ocean while on law enforcement patrol." The excellent cutters are the ones that comply with the Commandant's fuel conservation program when appropriate. These are the units that conduct gun shoots or multi-ship exercises when the opportunity arises. They are the units that conduct open houses in foreign ports or whose corpsman offers his assistance to a small hospital on a South Pacific atoll. During Navy

operations, it is the HEC that the task force commander praises in his message traffic. Typical of these units is the practice of concise message traffic that keeps the chain of command informed of the progress of an operational mission while it progresses. The reports are never doctored to hide any problems that the unit may be having. Nor are they hesitant to call on assistance from the staff components when the situation warrants.

Whether the cutter's mission is buoy tending, search and rescue, fisheries patrols, or law enforcement; "the bottom line is the end result." No matter what operational task it is given, the excellent cutter will perform it in a professional fashion and without major hang ups. These units have such ship's mottos as "READY TO SERVE" and "CAN DO - HAVE DONE".

#### C. A COMPETENT EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The majority of the senior officers concurred that next to the commanding officer, the most important individual aboard a cutter is the executive officer(XO). Most say it is lonely at the top. Well, it is just as lonely in the middle. The executive officer of a cutter must behave as if he is the mirror image of the CO. An XO will normally assist in the formation of command policies but the XO must always communicate and enforce those policies as if they were his own. One officer feels that, "The executive officer



who sits around the wardroom all day bad mouthing the captain will do more to damage a ship than a two foot hole below the water line."

One commander, who has held twelve commands in his career, believes that one of an XO's primary duties is to act as a buffer between the captain and the crew. "If you have a hard exec then the captain has to be easy. If you have a hard captain then it is the exec's job to be easy, so to speak."

The executive officer is probably most influential in the area of morale. His policies concerning daily routine, liberty, request and complaint masts, and inspections can establish the attitude that the crew comes to work with. The XO must make a conscious effort to ensure that the corpsman is doing his job and that the chow aboard the cutter is up to the expectations of the crew. The XO is, without a doubt, king of the paperwork empire aboard a ship but he must realize that it is his drive and concern for the crew that accounts for the daily pulse of operations.

#### D. RIGHT PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT STUFF

The balance of strengths and weaknesses in a cutter's organizational personnel is key to whether it will be a success or failure. The importance of the commanding officer and the executive officer has already been mentioned but there are other groups and individuals whose leadership

and professionalism are just as important. One captain we interview said, "You can have the world's A-1 commanding officer but if his subordinates are of poor quality he can't make the difference. He cannot unilaterally raise the unit up to a point of excellence."

One captain described the influence structure of the different people as a pyramid. The CO is the top, followed by the executive and engineering officers, then department heads; until the foundation is reached. This foundation, upon which the entire structure rests, are the unit's young petty officers and non-rated personnel. The higher a position a person holds, the more people he can have an influence over. A weak level can be supported by strong adjacent levels unless, that weak level is totally without substance. The result would be the collapse of the entire pyramid or in this case, the deterioration of a unit's ability to complete its missions. "Everyone must make a contribution to the excellence of a unit, from CO to seaman recruit."

Due to changing technologies and ever increasing administrative requirements, a great many of the officers placed emphasis on having a sound wardroom. As one captain said, "If your officers are good leaders, then they will bring out the best in the rest of the chain of command. But if they are not, there's no way you are going to build yourself a good ship." Should the wardroom question every order or policy openly, then this discontent will filter

down and the unit will eventually be unable to perform to expectations. The wardroom can hurt a unit faster and harder than any other group aboard a cutter. As another captain told us, "So while the wardroom can certainly help you, it's even more important that it not hurt you."

Your front line leadership, as always, must come from the chief petty officers quarter's. What should the CPOs' leadership role be aboard a cutter? Their role, as one senior officer put it, is to take "the time and effort to identify what command policies and goals are and to support them." The chiefs must "carry that feeling of the tone, that is set from above, on down into the lower ranks."

Several of the officers reported that one of the first signs that a unit is having problems is the behavior of the CPOs. Letters to the district or a group of chiefs appealing their quarterly marks in writing indicate that a commanding officer has lost control of the situation aboard his unit. One salty commander said, "Unrest in the chiefs mess will stand out like a sore thumb" and can quickly destroy the morale and proficiency of a vessel. The chiefs act like a bridge between the officers and the remainder of the crew. Take away that bridge and the two groups will never get together on any matter of importance.

E. A GOOD SHIP LOOKS GOOD

Without hesitation, senior officers said that an excellent cutter is a good-looking cutter. Their hulls are free of running rust, fender marks, and battle scars. These ships proudly exhibited custom dodgers painted with the unit's name and motto. This attention to details is especially evident on the quarterdeck. Their quarterdecks are always clean, the watchstanders alert, and the area free of loitering personnel. One officer related to us that the excellent ship is the one whose bunting is never in need of replacement. The excellent units take the time to polish thier brightwork instead of painting it. The decks are always polished and the passageways always appear as if they have been freshly painted. One distinguishing feature of an excellent cutter will be its messdeck. They are always brightly painted, tablecloths in place, fresh fruit on the tables, and there is always one of those punch dispensers bubbling away.

The excellent cutters will extend this attention to details to the manner in which they operate. When entering of leaving port, the crew will be in their dress uniforms and manning the rail in a military fashion. On the dock, you will hear only proper orders being given during docking and undocking evolutions and not alot of hollering from the bridge to the linehandlers. And, as if by magic, the unit's announcing system will not be blasting away constantly.

## F. TRAINING THE TROOPS

The objective of training within the Coast Guard is to give its people the abilities to complete their missions when called to duty. The responsibility to ensure that this is accomplished rests with the commanding officer. The difference between an average and an excellent unit is, according to one officer, "partially a result of the quality of training aboard it."

It is not uncommon for a unit's training plan to feel the crunch should the operational schedule need to be altered. In hindsight, many seniors commented on the need for this practice to be discontinued and a higher priority be given to keeping the training schedule intact. Commanding officers must stress the importance of training to their officers, who must in turn transmit this message down the chain of command. One captain's policy is to "Do your planned training, do it right, and your job will be easier and your unit better off."

A past HEC skipper related to us that he had to commit himself to a training plan and stick to it. He notified his training officer that while in standby status his unit would get underway twice a quarter for training. These trips involved major preparations and lasted up to five days. The trips were not taken lightly by any member of the crew. This captain discovered the availability of Navy training

facilities that could be used by his ship at little or no charge and visited these sites during his scheduled training periods. He reminded us that, "There are schools, team trainers, and off-duty programs available but a serious effort must be made to find them and then use them."

The senior officers reported that excellent ships are also the ones that have aggressive training programs. The drills on these unit are not conducted just to fulfill yearly requirements but to ensure their crews are prepared to handle an emergency situation. The excellent command shows some innovation in the design of their drills. A commander told us of a unit that night drills instead of routine daytime drills to arouse interest.



#### IV. THE VIEW FROM BEHIND A DESK

Next, we asked the senior officers to change their perspective and tell us what indicators of excellence were available to them in their staff positions. In clarifying the question to several officers, we stipulated that they limit the indicators to those available to them as operational or administrative commanders. Some examples we supplied were message traffic, routine administrative reports, and information from staff conferences.

A small percentage of the officers interviewed felt that the question could not be accurately answered. Some said that an evaluation from a desk could not be made with any reliability, and that most of the data was either rumor or just what the unit wanted the staff to hear. Some officers on headquarters and area staffs frankly did not feel close enough to the fleet to attempt an evaluation. This was particularly true of those officers who had been away from the fleet for any length of time. Most officers, especially those at the district level, did give some interesting opinions.

##### A. UNTIL THE PAPERWORK IS DONE

If there is something that a sailor who loves the smell of the salt air hates, it is the command of a desk and the

paperwork that it takes to keep it afloat. As tedious as it is, however, paperwork is important. As the gold on the shoulderboards increases, so does the knowledge that completed staff work and success go hand in hand.

With the exception of one captain, administrative reports and messages were considered good indicators of a unit's performance level. One captain told us that there was a wealth of such reports and messages, and that different staff positions used different ones. But no matter what, the quality and contents of reports are examined. One officer said that one indicator of a unit's professionalism is the cruise report. "I'm not looking for it by the pound. What I'm looking for is the quality of the report. I'm not looking for how many questions they are asking the staff, but the kind of recommendations they make on problems they may have had." Another captain said he looked at the unit's Officer Performance Reports. As an indicator, correct and thorough OPRs show the attention to detail practiced by a unit, as well as how a commanding officer perceives his wardroom. Another officer said he considered a unit's safety report. His contention was that the better the unit, the less careless injuries he would find on the report.

Message traffic is one of the most important sources of information on the perceived level of performance of a unit. For underway units it is virtually the only source. Many

officers said that the tone and attitude of messages were critical in determining its impact. As one captain put it, "I hate to receive mewling, whining, piking messages from an underway unit." Senior staff officers agree that they hate to hear excuses. They do want to be kept informed. Excellent units do this well. If a unit sends a message about a problem then the staff wants to see a complete description of it, parts or assistance needed, and possible solutions to prevent further occurrences.

But not all officers believed that reports are good indicators of excellence aboard a cutter. One captain felt that reports in no way should be used while several others felt that certain reports were given too much weight and were not representative of the true performance of a unit. One such report was that of the District Inspection. One captain felt that the District Inspector "does not have the resources available to him, nor the expertise to be an inspector for anything else but the area of his major qualification." The inspection team is usually picked from those personnel not needed at the District Office, and don't possess the skill, either interpersonal or technical, to work with the field unit.

#### B. THE REFTRA "E"

There was almost an even split among the officers interviewed on the use of Navy Refresher Training as an

indicator of excellence on Coast Guard cutters. Among those staff officers that thought Reftra was a useful indicator, some said that they examined the reports to see if the same inspection discrepancies appeared as in the previous reports. Others said they looked for improving scores during training and if remarks on the crew's attitude were positive. Senior officers tend to evaluate a unit more on the preparation and effort than actual scores. As one admiral put it, "Your report of Refresher training is a concrete measure of how the ship performed. A particular ship that has not been in red-hot shape, but comes out doing well probably is a good unit. Because they are able to pull together and get the job done." These officers felt that the more "E"s on the side of a unit, the better performer she was.

Other officers told us that Reftra "E"s mean very little since they are a short term measure. One captain said "E"s "are an indicator of the level of performance on a given day at a given location with a given crew, and mean very little after that." Some officers said that not having "E"s is sometimes seen as meaning a unit is not excellent. They felt that this was not fair. Too many ships train just for Reftra and usually for a short period just prior to training. Some of these score high but may not be anywhere near being an excellent cutter. Most officers agreed that a measure that showed sustained high performance would be more accurate.

What the senior officers do agree on is that excellent ships usually are proud exhibitors of "E's". The awards themselves do not necessarily indicate that a unit is excellent but rather that the unit overall is doing something right.

## V. YOU HAVE TO WALK THE GROUND

No accurate evaluation of a cutter can be made by an officer unless he visits the unit. As one officer said, "You have to walk the ground." Every officer interviewed felt that this evaluation could be made within a short period. Some felt that a walk from the quarterdeck to the wardroom was enough, while others said an entire day aboard was about right. A captain told us that his evaluation could be made by observing a unit from reveille to morning colors. He said that his evaluation was seldom far off the mark. Some officers confessed that their feelings could be incorrect based on just one visit. They occasionally evaluated a unit as a weak sister only to find out they were wrong later, but this was not usually the case. We did not find anyone who, once they made the evaluation of a unit as excellent, later changed their minds based on further information.

### A. NO RUST, NO PROBLEM

A point of total agreement among the officers was that an excellent ship was always a clean ship. These units always washed down prior to entering port, and didn't look like a disaster area during drydocking. Their maintenance procedures do not include the practice of painting over rust



or failing to complete proper preparation before painting. It is worth repeating that no officer knew of any dirty vessel that was known as an excellent cutter. They admit that, in theory, it was possible, but not likely. There are times when even the best vessels look poorly. A captain commented, "There's an exception to everything. You have to ask yourself, what have they been doing? Are they a busy unit? You must be able to judge a situation."

The first impression during an informal visit usually contributes more to the opinion that an officer holds concerning a unit's excellence than does a formal inspection. Most of the officers interviewed said that they started their evaluation while on the dock. A good unit recognizes that garbage or supplies piled all over the dock detracts from the unit's appearance. They looked at the cleanliness of the bow and quarterdeck, as well as the appearance and attitude of the watchstanders. These first few minutes were considered by many to be critical to the judgement of a unit.

The berthing areas are also an excellent indicator of the state of a unit. Clean berthing areas probably show that daily inspections are conducted. It illustrates that the command cares how its people live, and that the crew themselves have the discipline and pride to keep their living spaces clean.

Several officers gained an impression about a unit from its wardroom. Poor signals are when a wardroom is full of spare parts, the furniture needs repair, and the bulkheads have not been painted since commissioning. A good unit will have a bright, clean professional wardroom. One officer told us that there was a sense of tradition in the wardrooms of excellent units. He said, "They will be using china and silver and not eating off trays from the mess deck. Meals will be served on time with the amenities being observed. On an excellent unit, the wardroom is a place of which an officer can be proud."

The work spaces aboard a unit will tell a visitor about the attitudes of the different departments and if "the divisions are consistent around the ship?" One senior officer told us that he could accurately predict the operational record of a cutter by the materiel condition of the engineering spaces. If the engine room is painted and free of oil, the bilges dry, the deckplates clean, and the tools properly stowed, then the unit will probably have less than its share of unscheduled down-time. A clean set of engineering spaces show pride and commitment to something more than an eight hour workday or a five day work week.

#### B. LOOK SHARP, BE SHARP

The military bearing of the crew stood out in the interviews as an indicator of a cutter's excellence. One

officer look to see if " everybody was wearing the uniform of the day?" The senior officers felt that the appearance of the crew reflected the attitude of the command. If a unit requires that its personnel comply with established standards, they will have the tendency to function in other areas with the same attention to detail.

This pertains not only to uniform and grooming standards, but to the knowledge and use of military customs and courtesies. On an excellent ship, salutes are given when appropriate and in a proper manner. The quarterdeck watchstanders know when and how to render honors. On an excellent cutter, the color detail is well trained, and colors are never late.

The crew of an excellent cutter will carry this behavior off the ship as well. As one officer relates, "They wear the sharpest uniforms even in the exchange, and never fail to render a salute and sound off a greeting." The crew will dress in an appropriate manner and seldom behave in such a manner as to embarrass themselves or their command. They live not only by the rules but by their spirit, also.

#### C. WE'RE NUMBER ONE

The officers and men of an excellent unit display a positive attitude about their command and themselves. They are never ashamed to tell other sailors what ship they are on. It is this sense of pride in ones unit that separate the good from the bad units.

Officers visiting a unit observe the enthusiasm with which they are greeted. Does the individual expell a sense of "This is my ship, we're good, welcome aboard."? Does the sailor stand tall and look you straight in the eye when he is being spoken to? On a unit that has its act together, they will. They are glad to be stationed on that vessel and will gladly tell you why. The crew will have a feeling of accomplishment in the operational record of their unit. A senior officer will become concerned if during a meeting with a crew no questions or the wrong questions are being asked. After twenty plus years of service, most senior officers have heard all the questions and are capable of recognizing which questions mean trouble.

#### D. DOWN TO THE SEA

Well, that is what the senior officers had to say about "excellence in the surface Coast Guard". From their experiences they provided us with what attributes were exhibited by excellent cutters. They stressed leadership in the commanding officer, dedicated personnel, and getting the job done. From their positions as administrative and operational commanders, senior officers rely on administrative reports and messages to evaluate the performance of a ship. When they visited an excellent ship, they found it clean and well maintained, a sharp looking crew, and a strong sense of unit pride.

We explained to the officers that we next wanted to visit several excellent units to observe how they operate. We requested that they recommend units that they felt were excellent. The next five chapters is our story of a day in the life of an excellent cutter.

## VI. IN THE FLEET

They really are out there-- the excellent cutters. If you were lucky enough to have been assigned aboard one then you know what it's like; the well trained professional crew that is fiercely proud, the bridge wing covered with awards and "E"s, the mast stencilled with victory emblems, and the engineroom so clean "...it could be mistaken for the mess deck." Perhaps it sounds too good to be true, but cutters like that do exist in the fleet.

Before we continue, however, there is the matter of how we chose which cutters to visit. As we have said before, we had no generally recognized set of objective measures that we could use to evaluate our population of cutters. This left us with really only one criterion: the subjective recommendations made when we asked the senior officers to name cutters in the HEC/MEC classes that fit their own vision of excellence.

Some officers, especially those in headquarters positions, felt that they could not name excellent cutters because they were too far away from the action. Most others named cutters within their district or area, although several were able to make recommendations across area/district boundaries due to their recent transfers. In total twelve different cutters were named, but only five



cutters received three or more nominations. These became our Phase II interview targets. We could not arrange interviews with all five cutters due to conflicts between their operational commitments and our academic schedules, and time and money constraints. In the end, we were able to spend time aboard two excellent cutters.

Each visit began about 0900, and we spent at least eight hours on each cutter. As in Phase I, our primary data collection technique was the individual and group unstructured interview. However, we did make a conscious attempt to observe the people and the events happening around us during our visits. A typical day began with an hour-long interview with the commanding officer, another hour with the executive officer, and a tour of the vessel followed by lunch in the wardroom. After lunch, we had separate hour-long interviews with the following groups: 4-6 officers(W-2 to O-3), 4-6 chief petty officers(E-7), 3-5 first class petty officers(E-6), and 4-6 junior enlisted personnel(E-5 to E-2). The interviews were structured to be low-key and open-ended so that as many people as possible would have a chance to talk. We tried to avoid questions that could be answered by a simple "yes" or "no". For example, we asked such questions as "What do you like best about working around here?" , "What is the CO's command philosophy?", or "Is this an excellent cutter? If so, why?".

In addition to these type of questions, we also used ones we had developed from our interviews with the senior officers. Exact questions depended on the individual or group being interviewed, but we covered such items as the relationship between the CO and the XO, the relationship between the wardroom and the CPO mess, attitudes of the crew, appearance of the ship and crew, task accomplishment, discipline, and morale.

What did the excellent cutters tell us? Once we had completed a cutter visit, we analyzed the data and listed the attributes of that unit. We then compared the lists of attributes so that we could identify the items that were repeated. These repeat items are what we considered to be the most important factors. They represent the commonalities that we saw at work on the excellent cutters. We realize that our limited sample of two cutters may have prevented us from seeing other common factors that may also be present aboard excellent cutters. However, we do think that our findings are significant, and are of interest to personnel of the surface operations fleet.

For the sake of convenience we broke the factors down into discrete chapters, but that isn't how it really is. Everthing is related to everything else. The CO's emphasis on developing subordinates is related to the excellent training programs we saw, and the pride in evidence is related to the concern for people attitude. In the next

four chapters we will present what we found. But in a nutshell, the following attributes best described what we saw:

- \* MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT
- \* DEVELOPING SUBORDINATES
- \* CONNECTED WITH THE SHIP
- \* ALSO, THE XO
- \* CONCERN FOR THE CREW
- \* FAMILY SUPPORT
- \* COOPERATION AND TEAMWORK
- \* RECOGNITION AND AWARDS
- \* THE BAD WITH THE GOOD
- \* TRAINING AND EDUCATION
- \* DISCIPLINE
- \* IT LOOKS GOOD AND IT WORKS

## VII. THE CAPTAIN IS THE DRIVER

On the excellent ships we visited, the man in the driver's seat was the commanding officer. This may seem a statement of the obvious, since it is the function of the CO to guide the operations of his ship. But on board the excellent cutters, the impact of the CO was tremendously pervasive. In virtually every facet of the ship's operation, he set the tone. Almost every person or group we interviewed, from the XO down to the seaman recruit, said in strong terms that the CO was the main force driving the ship and themselves to perform well. One first class petty officer, when asked to pick the most important factor in the ship's success, said, "...it all goes back to the CO. He is there and he leads by example." On another cutter, a third class quartermaster said, "It's like we're working with him for our ship." A LTJG said, "I think in large measure, the captain is responsible for the success of the unit as a whole...."

The COs we interviewed realized that they had the ability and the responsibility to provide direction and meaning to their officers and crew. They all had concrete ideas of what it took to do this. However, their leadership styles were not the same. One captain was characterized by his XO as a strong traditionalist, formal in his

relationships with the officers and crew, taking his meals alone, etc. Another captain used a much more relaxed and personal approach. But these surface features just masked the underlying similarities they shared. We noticed that they all placed a great deal of emphasis on virtually the same list of techniques such as communicating their standards by actions as well as words, being out and about, and relying on the executive officer. More important was the fact that they shared the same approach in three broad areas. We've called them: mission accomplishment, developing subordinates, and connected to the crew. Rather than present a list of the management techniques we saw being used, we decided to talk about these broad areas.

#### A. MISSION ACCOMPLISHMENT

The commanding officers unanimously said that consistently meeting (and sometimes exceeding) their operational commitments was at the heart of their command philosophy. There were two reasons for this. First, they saw it as the bottom line. Accomplishing the various tasks such as search and rescue and law enforcement is what the taxpayers are paying for. Second, the captains recognized that mission accomplishment is the gauge by which they and their cutter are measured by their superiors. They conceded that this might not always be fair, but it is the way the game was played. Although they felt a very strong personal

responsibility to ensure the missions were accomplished in a bristol fashion, their main concern was that the officers and crew shared their understanding and commitment to getting the job done.

The first and best tool that the commanding officers used to meet their concerns was proper planning. They said they repeatedly stressed to their people the importance of staying ahead of the action and practicing forehandedness in every way. On the excellent cutters, this planning environment was obvious at all levels. For example, on one cutter we found that a written plan had been promulgated concerning our visit. It was thorough, flexible enough to allow for the inevitable glitches, and people knew about it. A first class petty officer we asked about this said it was normal to do this, that "if you really plan out something, like changing heads on diesels, and something goes wrong so that only half of your plan is any good--well, you're still ahead of the game by 50 percent." One XO put it succinctly: "...the seven P's come into play, proper prior planning prevents piss poor performance. If he emphasizes anything else to me, that's what it is."

Another powerful tool that the COs used was the insistence that every job, no matter how small, be done thoroughly. They were sticklers that the details be done right. On one cutter, a LTJG called it, "...holding people to completing a job thoroughly." A CPO said that "The CO



expects every man down the chain of command to do their job. He expects professionalism."

#### B. DEVELOPING SUBORDINATES

The COs were unanimous in their belief that one of their primary tasks was to develop their subordinates. One CO said, "I have only two goals: mission accomplishment, and training of my junior personnel." This applied especially to his junior officers. One CO said, "...it's important that they(junior officers) be competent in seamanship and leadership when they leave here...."

To the COs of the excellent cutters, developing their subordinates begins with the recognition that people are different-- that some are more capable than others. A LT summarized the attitude: "...people are not generalized-- those that can handle more are given more."

The first thing they are given is a clear chain of command. On all the cutters, great emphasis was put on making the chain of command a viable tool for supervision and communications. In an interview with the first-class petty officers on one cutter, they stated that a working chain of command was critical to their success. One likened the chain of command to a cutter's hull. The hull keeps the cutter afloat, and allows the work to be accomplished. If one link in the chain is not working, it is like a crack in the hull. The longer the crack is left alone, the bigger it

will get, until the hull fails and the ship sinks. The metaphor may be mixed, but the meaning is clear.

The CO's felt that subordinates must also be given the freedom to perform their jobs. They felt that there were two ways to do this. First, the subordinates must understand that they are accountable for the work they do. On one cutter, a LT said, "...it's really a remarkable characteristic--he's also willing to take what you give him, as long as it's thorough...he will give you the right to produce work for him on your level." The second part of this freedom is that although the CO has the ultimate responsibility for success, their subordinates must be allowed to make mistakes. The balance is a fine one, and as one CO said, "I have to be willing to take the heat." A LT called the resulting atmosphere, "...a non-threatening environment." Another said, "... (officers) are not afraid to make decisions--they're not afraid to take on a task fearing that if they don't do well, something is going to happen to them adversely."

The final aspect of developing subordinates has a lot to do with the training program. The excellent ships constantly searched for training opportunities outside the ship, especially "C" schools or specialized training schools, for both individuals and groups. They would send personnel off for training even if it meant that the ship sailed short on deployment. A lot of people we talked to

mentioned this fact, but no one seemed upset at having to pull extra weight. One seaman told us that he knew his chance was coming.

#### C. CONNECTED WITH THE SHIP

A commander that we interviewed during Phase I said he thought that the CO of an excellent ship would be "connected to the crew." He explained that he meant the CO considered the ship, the crew and himself to be an integral unit; that the CO had an "our ship" rather than a "my ship" attitude. The result would be a CO who had unobstructed two-way communications with the officers and crew, and whose policies and programs were understood by them.

We certainly saw this on board the excellent units. It was most clearly manifested in the COs' relationship with the XO, officers, and crew. One captain stated that he felt the open working relationship he had established with the wardroom was critical to the ship's success. He believed that if he was able to bring his wardroom on board by understanding his philosophy of command, then the impact of his policies and programs would be strengthened and broadened. And the wardrooms seemed to respond to that atmosphere. One LTJG said, "The CO is a shipmate." On the other ship, a LTJG said, "He eats in the wardroom so we can talk to him. We have an open relationship with the CO, but he's still the CO."

The CO worked to foster his philosophy at all levels. During the course of a working day, he moved around and talked to everybody he met. Almost unanimously, those we interviewed said that the CO was personable and approachable. A CPO told us that the CO visited the chief's mess at least once every day to have a cup of coffee and talk over the day's events. This same CO also said that he made it a point to visit the mess deck and lounges informally to talk with his crew. The COs were alert for any opportunity to get the word out to the crew. In addition to the usual methods of plan of the day and quarters, they used other, less traditional methods. On one cutter, a seaman said that when the ship was involved in boarding operations, the CO was constantly on the ship's announcing system telling those not directly involved about what was going on.

#### D. ALSO, THE XO

Many of the senior officers we interviewed in Phase I said that they believed the XO would be a key player on an excellent cutter. We certainly found this to be true. However, on both excellent cutters, the influence of the XO was tied to the command philosophy of the CO. Because there was such a very strong, positive relationship between the CO and the XO, we've chosen to present the XO's story in this chapter.

On board the excellent cutters, there is a clear differentiation between the role of the XO and that of the CO, and there is effective integration in the CO/XO team. The CO let the XO run the ship's daily routine and take care of the normal administration. One XO said, "He(the CO) can do anything he wants, but he lets me do my job. I just keep him informed." This practice of "keeping the Old Man informed" was the second aspect of the CO/XO relationship. There seemed to be a good deal of effective communications going on between the two.

This rapport was key in what we saw as one of the XO's most important tasks. On board both of the excellent cutters, the XO is the great implementer. He is responsible for transferring broad policy guidance into workable programs that fit the Plan of the Day. One XO used a navigation metaphor to describe this process. He likened the CO to the ship's navigator; responsible for determining the course and speed necessary to get the ship to its destination. He then communicates his plan to the OODs by laying tracklines down on the navigational charts. The XO is like the OOD, who must steer courses and speeds to make good the tracklines. Like the OOD who provides feedback to the navigator on the ship's progress, the XO is constantly providing feedback to the CO on the progress of his policies and programs.

### VIII. THE UNIT FAMILY

The excellent cutters we visited possessed a strong family feeling. By this we mean that the people we talked to had a strong sense of identity with the unit and seemed to care about what happened to others in the crew. This meant not only official concern by the chain of command, but also a close personal concern for each other. In fact, it was often hard to distinguish one from the other. Although not everyone felt that their command cared enough about them and their job, most felt that they and the job they did were appreciated by the various levels in the chain of command.

This was no accident. Although they gave a top priority to getting the operational mission done, the COs of the excellent cutters had a definite people orientation. They recognized that the ship's missions were accomplished through the hard work and commitment of the crew. One CO said that "A ship is only steel and people breathe life into it. You must pay attention to their needs on a personal basis." In order to perform their task in an excellent manner, a crew had to be more than a collection of individuals who happened to be doing a lot of different jobs on the same 378-foot length of steel. A crew needed a strong sense of unified purpose, and to these COs this meant family. One CO said that he felt that a person in the Coast



Guard had a personal family, a unit family, and a Coast Guard family. A person could not be an effective part of his unit family until his personal family needs were secure.

#### A. CONCERN FOR THE CREW

This family feeling began even before a new person arrived. On the excellent cutters, the sponsor program worked. By the time a new person walked on board, he was already considered a member of the crew. On one ship, the CO presented the new crew member with a unit ball cap at quarters as a symbol that he belonged. He said that it literally "puts everybody out at quarters under the same hat...."

This intense concern began with the CO. It went farther than the CO walking about daily or conducting the weekly zone inspections. It involved actively looking for ways to improve living conditions. One CO was appalled by the condition of the berthing areas when he relieved; compartments smelled, lockers were in poor shape, paintwork was old and chipped, and there was no privacy. He arranged self-help funding, and the berthing areas were completely rehabilitated by the crew. When we visited, these berthing areas were spotless, and the people living in them were proud to show us where they lived. On this same cutter, the CO believed that the quality of chow was one of the best measures of this feeling. He had gone to great lengths to

improve the quality of both the food and the service. This entailed arranging for special training for the ships cooks at commercial restaurants, visits by subsistence specialist assistance teams from both the Coast Guard and the Navy, and constant suggestions from the crew on ways to improve. Every person we talked to on this cutter commented on the great job that their cooks were doing. Most said that they hoped we could eat lunch to see what they meant. We did. The lunch was an outstanding meal, one of the best either of us has ever eaten on any ship.

The caring and concern was visible at other levels in the command, too. Most people felt that the example set by the CO was worth following. One first class petty officer said, "He(the CO) cares, so you care." A LTJG told us that watching the CO and XO work had shown him what "taking care of your troops" really means.

#### B. FAMILY SUPPORT

A strong family support program was in effect on the excellent cutters. It wasn't just a paperwork issue, either. As a CO told us, "It's difficult enough being aboard here without having to worry about your family while you're gone...." Again, it all began with the sponsor program. A family was contacted long before they came to the area. On one cutter, a close liason was maintained with a local Air Force base housing office to help make

arrangements for new families. When they arrived in the area, they were met by their sponsor who had arranged for temporary lodging and who helped them get settled. Although the system wasn't perfect, the vast majority of people we interviewed said it helped them.

The support program didn't stop there, however. On one cutter, the CO held regular meetings with the crew's wives. These usually included a luncheon and presentations by the department heads on the ship's upcoming deployment. Another cutter sponsored a party or picnic during the inport periods. The most recent one, a buffet dinner served on the flight deck at sunset, was still being talked about. The excellent cutters produced a newsletter to keep the families informed. On one cutter, it took the form of a ship's newspaper, including photographs and stories about some of the crew. One E6 said that his wife felt "...it filled a little bit of the emptiness."

Another part of the program was the support network fostered among the families. Usually centered around a telephone contact list, the network helped them stay in touch when the ship was deployed, acting as a communication network so that news of the ship or any emergencies among the families could be exchanged quickly. One CO told us about the time one of the wives broke three ribs roller skating with her children. Several other wives took turns caring for the children while she was recovering, and

arranged babysitting when she had to go to the doctor, and generally cared for the family until she recovered.

### C. COOPERATION AND TEAMWORK

The excellent cutters displayed a unique sense of cooperation and teamwork in carrying out the mission. In almost every group of people we interviewed, someone said something like, "Everyone likes one another." Most spoke of being considerate of others and a strong sense of camaraderie. A LTJG said it was a "mutual self-respect from all elements of the ship--so that the people meld together nicely." On both ships, the wardroom and the CPO mess seemed to enjoy a good working relationship based this feeling. One CPO told us that he felt comfortable working with the officers because they listened to what the CPOs had to say. On the same ship, an ENS said that junior officers were not terrorized because they were inexperienced, but that the CPOs were always helpful in solving problems.

One CO said that his attitude is that everyone is equally responsible for each other. A LT, talking about the planning operations that went on during a law enforcement deployment, said, "It's definitely not a one person show--it's a team effort." He told us that the CO would hold daily briefings, which he called his braintrust meetings, and talk over the coming days' plan. These meetings were open and free flowing exchanges of information and opinion.

If the CO liked what an LTJG said, then that LTJG might end up running tracklines and planning the operation. Also, the Operations officer told us that it was not unusual for lookouts or quartermasters to come to him or other OODs with suggestions and ideas on future operations. On the other cutter, there was a distinct bias for the term "working together". The best example of this was the washdown prior to docking at homeport. This evolution involved washing down the topside areas of the ship with fresh water. After three or four weeks underway, getting this expanse of white paint clean can be quite a chore. But everyone from the CO down to the boot seaman and fireman is involved.

A LTJG noted that there was a lack of the intense infighting that sometimes goes on among departments and divisions aboard ship. A good example of this was the work done by the operations department in cleaning and repainting the quarterdeck in the portside air castle. This area was normally the responsibility of the deck department. It needed work badly, and because the deck department was shorthanded and overworked, the OPS department took over the job so that the ship would keep looking good.

Much of this strong sense of unit identity, of family, carried over into the fierce pride we saw on the excellent units. In the next chapter we cover the topic of pride.

## IX. PRIDE AT ALL LEVELS

"I would match (this ship) against any cutter in the Coast Guard," one CPO said. "We are damn good," said an LTJG. The pride in evidence on board the excellent units was intense. The COs were, of course, proud of their commands, but they told us to talk to the crew. In our interviews with crew members, when we asked them if they were excellent, most were quick to say that their ship was the best high or medium endurance cutter in the fleet, and some said that they were the best in the Coast Guard. This consensus cut across all rank boundaries. The seamen were just as adamant in their belief as the officers or chiefs. Out of the approximately fifty officers and enlisted men that we interviewed, only one said he had seen a better ship.

A CPO told us, "The ship radiates pride both in themselves and in the ship." On the excellent cutters, pride in the unit began with the individual crew members. It stemmed from each person being confident in his own skills and in having the ability to accomplish his assigned tasks. If they possessed this self-confidence, they would be able to express their pride in unit. One CO said he saw it as a matter of "...starting with an individual pride in doing a good job." It was the responsibility of every



supervisor to first foster this self-pride. Only then could unit pride follow from the accomplishment of unit missions.

#### A. RECOGNITION AND AWARDS

How were the supervisors on the excellent cutters able to elicit this fiercely loyal pride we saw? The first and best tool was recognizing good performance and rewarding it in the correct way. On both the excellent cutters, it was a stated goal of the commanding officer to make sure that good performance was officially recognized and rewarded. On both cutters, official awards were given frequently. One CPO stated that his ship was the most awarded cutter he had ever seen. On the other cutter the people still mentioned a story about the number of awards given to an entire boarding party for a certain case. They said events such as that showed them that the command realized that everyone involved in such an operation was to some degree responsible for its success, and were awarded appropriately. This is not to say that awards were given frivolously at every opportunity. But the excellent commands seemed to use the award system very frequently to recognize their good performers.

Awards ceremonies were used not only to present official awards, but also as a time for recognition of other accomplishments, such as advancements, education course completions, watch qualification, and Seaman of the Quarter award. On one cutter, the ship bought rating pins for

personnel being advanced and cuttermen pins for those meeting the permanent qualifications, and presented them during the awards ceremonies. On another cutter, meritorious masts were frequently held to recognize individual performance. The people we talked to appreciated being singled out as winners by the command.

Recognition of good performance was not done just at special ceremonies. Nor was it restricted to recognition given only by the CO or XO, either. It seemed to be an everyday, on-the-spot affair practiced by those in all levels of the chain of command. The COs told us that they stressed the use of simple praise for a job well done. Their supervisors had apparently taken the lesson to heart. One LTJG said that he tried to find at least one thing every day to praise about everyone in his division. At first it was hard, but the more he practiced, the easier it became.

#### B. THE BAD WITH THE GOOD

Just as good performance was recognized, poor performance was also given attention. Although on one cutter, captain's masts were open, most other negative recognition was kept private. One CO said that it was important to show the crew that substandard performance would not be tolerated. Those personnel that performed poorly were counseled, and records kept of the event. If they continued to give poor performance, then the command

began to question whether this person could be part of the team. The poor performer was given a chance to meet the standards, but continued failure to do so usually meant that he did not remain on the ship very long.

We are not saying that the commands were headhunting. They seemed genuinely interested in bringing everyone on board, as we said in Chapter VIII. But it was a matter of not wasting valuable time and other resources on "dirtbags". A person who was unwilling to be a part of the team was not wanted.

## X. CONSISTENT MANAGEMENT

Although neither commanding officer talked specifically about consistent management, it was clear from the other things they talked about that they believed in it. By this we don't mean that they treated everyone the same or that they never broke their own rules. We mean that the command philosophy had been clearly defined, policies and programs were in effect. Most people felt that they were in control of the situation. "The only problems we have are things we don't have control over. Like the operational schedule," said one first class petty officer. There appeared to be little wasted effort and "herky-jerky" management was not the norm. The crews felt that this gave them an edge on other ships, and was a big reason that they were so successful. Just as Gullickson and Chenette(1984) found in the Navy, most of the time the ship was in automatic.

The areas we've already talked about, such as the COs' philosophy of planning or the command concern for people, are good examples of the consistent management approach. Because we felt that they were the more important attributes of excellence, we organized them into separate chapters. In this chapter, we've grouped together various policies and programs that also illustrate this approach.

## A. TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The excellent cutters heavily emphasize continual training and education. This is partly a result of the people concern and the desire to develop subordinates. To the COs the ships' training program was a very high priority. One XO said, "The CO stresses it...the ship's philosophy is that we will take advantage of sufficient training opportunities to keep the ship ready--and then some." He said this policy was tied to meeting the personal goals of the crew as well as the readiness goals of the ship.

Training was an everyday evolution. It was routinely scheduled and was carried out, even though both XOs wished that Murphy's Law could be repealed<sup>2</sup>. Many people said that they would like to see more training, but most felt that the majority of training was worthwhile. On one of the cutters, we were told that the qualification board, which reviewed applicants for all major watchstanding positions, was responsible for ensuring that the training was

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<sup>2</sup>The XO corollary to Murphy's Law says that five minutes before a scheduled training period, one of three things will happen: 1) A slight breeze will suddenly reach hurricane force, or 2) a SAR case involving the governor's daughter will develop, or 3) a real fire will break out in the seaman's head. The training will be cancelled. The Yeoman's addendum to the XO corollary says that the POD scheduling the training will be the one that the yeoman retyped at 0200 in the morning.

appropriate. Proper planning was an essential part of internal training, too. One engineering officer told us that the XO required a well thought out plan for drills and training evolutions, and would not tolerate the spur of the moment, "lets have a fire drill" operation.

The excellent cutters sent a lot of people to external schools and training, even if it meant the ship sailed short during a deployment. An engineer on one of the cutters told us that on a recent deployment the ship sailed missing three engineering watch officers because they were attending school. A lot of people felt that most ships would not send people to schools because they were needed to stand watches. As qualified people were transferred, this resulted in less qualified watchstanders, who could not be sent to school, either. The result was a low level of training among all watchstanders. Somehow, the excellent cutters had broken the vicious circle and were able to train their people.

#### B. DISCIPLINE

On the excellent cutters, discipline was traditionally handled. Although one CO said that he preferred to use positive measures and act before disciplinary problems occurred, he believed strongly in using a clear chain of command. One XO called it the "percolation system". Authority for dealing with disciplinary problems was delegated as far down the chain of command as possible. The



petty officer would handle problems and only if necessary percolate them upward to higher levels. The intent was two-fold; to get the solution as close to the problem as supervisory skill allowed, and to preserve the time and effort of the people higher up in the chain. One cutter, which characterized its disciplinary problems as minor, said that this system went as far down as the E4-E5 level. The other cutter, which called their disciplinary problem moderate, indicated their primary level for handling problems was the E6-E7 level.

#### C. IT LOOKS GOOD AND IT WORKS

The excellent cutters looked excellent. One cutter we visited had just returned from a three week deployment and looked as if it was ready for a district inspection. The other cutter was preparing for a major yard period, but the interior was clean and the quarterdeck looked outstanding. The crew took pride in the condition and cleanliness of their ships and they worked to maintain and improve it. A large placard in the engine room control booth exemplified this attitude; "CLEANLINESS--A Main Propulsion Tradition". Looking as good as the ship were the officers and crew. They were sharp. The leadership-by-example principle was at work here. We heard some people say that if the CO or the CPOs could look good, then they could, too. It was definitely a matter of pride that if

someone left the cutter he was in A-1 condition to uphold the reputation of the ship.

The weekly zone inspections played an important part in fostering this attitude. Although as subject to the XO corollary as training schedules, both the COs and the XOs we talked to said they were critical to keeping the ship in good condition. They considered it a good way to communicate their standards to those involved in the actual work. One cutter made it a point to involve junior officers and CPOs in the zone inspections.

As important as inspections in communicating standards of cleanliness and materiel condition was the routine day to day attention given it by all concerned. Sweepdowns and washdowns on these cutters was not a trivial, end of the day activity. Also, the CO's policy of being out and about amounted to a series of mini-inspections in many respects. Both XOs said they tried to make daily tours to keep up to date, and they required their department heads to do so.

Maintenance on the excellent cutters mirrored this attitude, also. The COs told us that they considered a sound maintenance program absolutely required if they were going to be successful. The overall attitude was "fix it now". The maintenance philosophy on one cutter was to get the job done right the first time, because there wasn't going to be enough time to do it over. Several engineers told us of their ship's 95-98 percent PMS completion rate,

at the same time letting us know that the fleet average was only 70-75 percent. The engineering CPOs on one cutter proudly told us "...we do PMS--we're sticklers for maintenance."

## XI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For three months we traveled around, interviewing senior staff officers and the officers and men of cutters. Through these interviews, it was revealed to us that Coast Guard leaders agree that policies are structured from the top and that excellent cutters do exist.

When we started our Phase I research, we did not appreciate the seriousness with which senior officers of operational backgrounds approach the subject of excellence in the surface Coast Guard. The impact that past surface experiences has had on these officers came through in the answers that they gave us. They made it clear to us that they hoped their inputs would benefit future seafaring officers. Junior officers sometimes forget that when a senior officer recommends a course of action, he speaks from experience and is attempting to prevent them from making the same mistakes he made or saw others make. We were not astonished by the attributes that they felt must be exhibited by a vessel to be classified as excellent in their minds. Nor were we shocked at what they told us they looked for as evaluators of excellence. From the first day a junior officer reports aboard a ship, he is taught to ensure his area of responsibility is kept clean and his troops look sharp. It is a sort of conditioning process in which an

officer climbs each rung of the experience ladder until he has acquired the necessary tools to become a molder of policy himself. For us, the data resulted in a picture of what it takes to make the grade as seen through the eyes of officers who have already made it. What impressed us was that there was so much agreement among the seniors about what was important and what an excellent cutter looked like. Chapters III-V can be viewed as offering future shipboard officers a set of guidelines for achieving a successful tour. This information can provide a sort of guide by which a new CO can prioritize the activities of his unit. A good example of this phenomenon is the young patrol boat skipper. Usually a LTJG with less than two years of active service, his experience is limited to that of a division officer. His performance during this time was guided by his department head or the executive officer. Because of limited experience, the young skipper's top concern becomes the safe and successful completion of operational missions. This is where the emphasis has been placed up to this point in his career. What the young officer fails to realize is that doing well in just operational duties is not enough. That there are other factors important in a commanding officer. He must practice management techniques that are best suited to his situation. He must comprehend the importance of the timely completion of routine matters such as admin reports or training. He must learn what is expected of him and how

to balance these requirements so as to impress his competence on his superiors.

From our interviews we have identified what attributes senior officers believe are exhibited by an excellent cutter. Without a doubt, the commanding officer sets the tone of his vessel. The unit can only reach the goal communicated by the CO. That the unit must be functioning at such a level that it is capable of successfully completing its operational missions. Not just under ordinary but also extraordinary circumstances. That a unit cannot achieve a an upper plateau of performance without the dedication and cooperation of the unit's management personnel. A critical member of these key management personnel is the executive officer. It is a position that must be filled by an officer with the basic qualifications to do the job. An excellent ship has a comprehensive training plan. Its training is accomplished with the same professionalism that dedication of any primary mission. And finally, that an excellent unit exhibits a sense of pride; a feeling that they are the best and will strive to remain the best. This is always accompanied by a vessel that is clean and a crew that is sharp in military bearing and in the way they conduct themselves.

In concluding our interviews, we asked the senior officers if they could name any vessels that met their description of excellence. Many units were mentioned. The



seniors gave us the impression that there are alot of cutters in the Coast Guard doing a fine job and that their numbers are constantly increasing. They pointed out that only a small percentage of these vessels were the embodiment of excellence. Five ships of the HEC and MEC classes were repeatedly mentioned. We visited two.

Enroute our first excellent ship, we had wondered about what we would find. Both of us had been lucky enough to have served on excellent ships, so we had our own opinions on the matter. We expected no real surprises. The positive atmosphere and attitude on each of the ships was overwhelming. The officers and men of these units were anxious to talk to us about their ship. Their pride shone through when declaring that their unit was the best in the fleet. From our visits aboard them, we identified what we felt were attributes of excellence.

The most obvious attribute in an excellent unit is superior commanding officer. His leadership abilities, expectations, and involvement are reflected in the outstanding performance of his command. The commanding officers and their crews demonstrated a belief the their unit was always prepared to complete their mission. They talked of outstanding patols that were accomplished through teamwork and commitment by the crew to achieving excellence. Professional development in subordinates was a key theme aboard excellent units. The CO's enforced this theme by

example. They allowed their officers the flexibility to do a job to the best of their abilities. But, they held their officers responsible for completing assignments at their individual levels of proficiency. This feeling of trust was especially evident in the relationships of commanding and executive officers. One philosophy of these ships is that excellence cannot be achieved without the essential ingredients of training and education. A climate of being a family existed aboard the cutters. Above all else, they were vessels that took care of their own. This concern for ones shipmate extended off the ship in the form of support activities for the families of crew members. The excellent ships accentuated the positive. Efforts were made to reward a job well done and captain's masts were most often held to present awards and not for punishment. The excellent ships were sharp in appearance and materially sound and their crews took a great deal of pride in this. It was if the excellent ships thought with just one brain and more importantly one heart.

These were no real surprises. We found what the senior officers predicted we would find: simply the basic tenets of good management and leadership being practiced in a consistent manner with common sense. But two facts in particular struck us. First, the excellent cutters were excellent at accomplishing their missions, but behind this was a genuine concern for people and a positive teamwork

attitude at work. Secondly, there is no doubt that the commanding officer is the most critical element in a cutter's success. This may seem an obvious statement, but we can't say it too often. The commanding officer's personality and behavior are a constant model for the entire ship. As many people told us: "As is the commanding officer, so is the ship". Officers aspiring for command must understand this fact.

What we saw operating in the fleet agrees with the various theories of management that we have learned in our career. We met commanding officers who realized that their personnel had specific needs that had to be fulfilled. They operated their units so as to satisfy the hierarchy of needs as described by Maslow. The captains of both cutters we visited are firm believers in McGregor's Theory Y management. They believed that their crews are not by nature lazy and unreliable; rather, they can be self-directed and creative in their work. This was the same attitude voiced by the senior officers in the Phase I interviews. Management by objectives is practiced on the excellent cutters. Neither commanding officer referred to the concept by its name. But both COs established goals and communicated them to their people in such a way that they became the common goals of the units. Subordinate officers set departmental goals consistent with command goals. Individuals were held accountable for their work and

performance was measured against the established standards. Whether learned from formal training or by hard experience, the officers use proven techniques and use them well.

What we learned in our study of cutters fit with many of the ideas that Peters and Waterman wrote about successful business organizations in their book, IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE. What Peters and Waterman called "Productivity through People", we talked as "The Unit Family". Much of what they talk about in their, "Autonomy and Entrepreneurship" attribute we think is in our, "Consistent Management" attribute. There are other similarities, but the main point is that the two studies have much in common.

Our result is not a cookbook approach to management at sea. Nor is it a collection of policies and programs that every good CO should implement. No such approach could do justice to the complex, polychronic culture that is a Coast Guard cutter. What we have attempted to do is present what a sample of senior, experienced officers had to say about excellence, and then to tell the stories of the excellent cutters we visited. We wanted to put down on paper what everyone talks about.

Undoubtedly there are limitations to the method we used. We especially might be criticized for not spending enough time to really get to the heart of the matter. Certainly, in a single day it is tough to cover everything. We would have liked to have spent some time aboard the cutters while

underway. But given our schedule constraints and our desire to keep our interference aboard to a minimum, this was not possible. We would recommend that anyone contemplating doing similar research with military units plan to spend a minimum of two days on board each unit. This would allow ample opportunity to observe a full menu of organizational events and to complete the interviews at an unhurried pace. However, we do feel that we were able to gain an honest evaluation of the tone and atmosphere in each unit, and to identify some attributes we saw at work on board the cutters. The people we talked to meant what they were saying.

Another criticism that could be levelled at us is that our results are suspect because we were able to visit only two cutters. They do represent forty percent of the sample we were interested in, namely cutters cited as excellent by at least three of the senior officers interviewed in Phase I. However, regardless of the number we visited, we have only presented those characteristics that we observed operating very strongly on both cutters. We are not saying that there are not other attributes. But we believe that the characteristics we observed are common to excellent units.

We realize that ours is not the final, all encompassing study on the subject of excellence at sea. We feel it is a useful first step, but much more needs to be done. We recommend the following:



- (1) Further study focused on the cutter fleet is needed to validate our research. An attempt should be made to extend our study to shore stations and even staff offices in order to identify the differences.
- (2) The findings of this study, and other studies like it, should be integrated into the leadership and management(LAM) training programs in the Coast Guard at all levels.

Finally, we hope that this study will be read as widely as possible in the cutter fleet. In the daily crush of getting our job done, we somehow never seem to discuss the important issues. Our intent was to start the ball rolling. We think that there can be nothing but beneficial effects resulting from a broad dialogue about the qualities that make a cutter better than the rest. The adage, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there", applies in this instance. To strive for EXCELLENCE, we must be able to recognize and understand it.

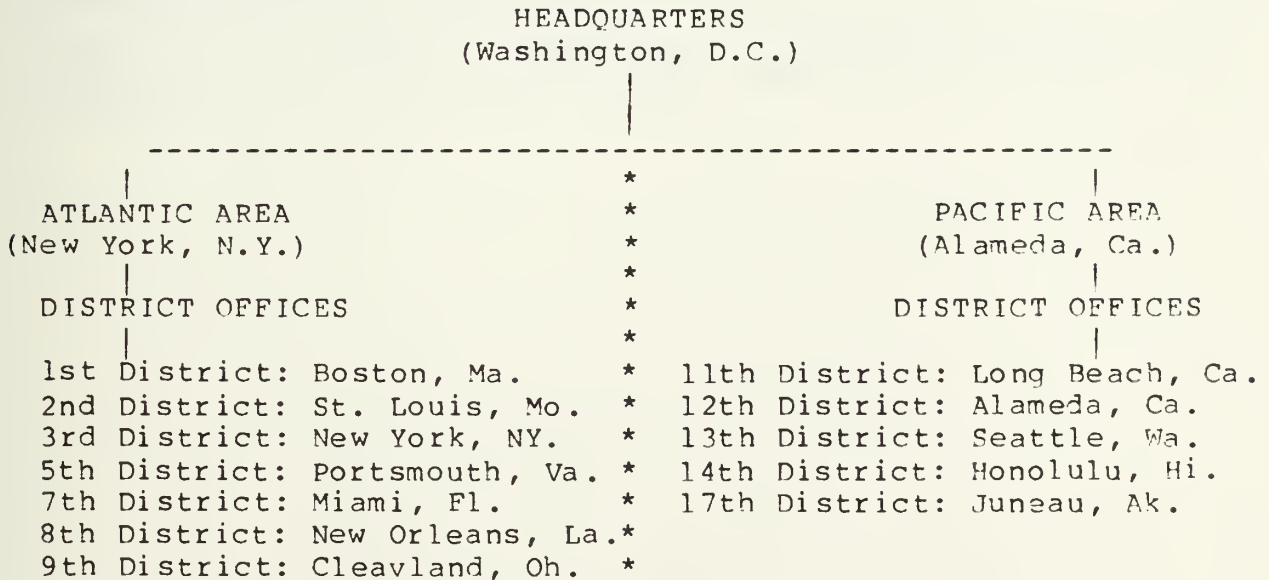


## APPENDIX A

### U. S. COAST GUARD ORGANIZATION

The United States Coast Guard is an armed service organized in peacetime under the Department of Transportation. In time of war or at the President's order, the Coast Guard operates under the jurisdiction of the United States Navy. The service numbers approximately 40,000 officers and men manning over three hundred ships and aircraft. Its responsibilities include ocean and coastal search and rescue, marine inspection of U. S. vessels, maritime pollution protection, enforcement of laws and treaties, and boating standards.

The organization of the Coast Guard is described in the following chart:



The Area offices are primarily responsible for administrative and planning activities to carry out headquarters programs and policies. District offices primarily control the operational units assigned to them. These various units, except for cutters in the HEC/MEC classes, are organized into Group and Station commands.

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